

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT  
LAWRENCE**

**INFORMANT: KATHERINE AVERKA  
INTERVIEWER: YILDEREY ERDENER  
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**Y = YILDEREY  
K = KATHERINE**

**SG-LA-T507**

Y: ...In '89. And my guest is Katherine Averka, A V E R K A. And uh, we talked before, but just for identification, um, so you were born in Lawrence? I forgot your birth date? 19 ?

K: 07.

Y: 07. And she gave me a nice picture of her brother. He was sent to New York. Now today we are going to talk about her work experiences I guess. And uh, the other day were were talking on the phone about favoritism, and how people um (--)

K: Oh well, well I went to work when I was fourteen. And uh, we used to be sent out. If there was no work they'd send you out. You would take the afternoon off. There was no unemployment. There was not um, what else? No unemployment, no social, well social security wouldn't have mattered. But they didn't have no unemployment, and they didn't have any (Y: benefits?), yeah, not benefits at all, and there was no welfare.

Y: Welfare, yeah. Uh, ask you the same thing maybe. (K: Okay) So you graduated from grammar school? And then you uh (--)

K: Yeah, I graduated from grammar school.

Y: And then uh?

K: And then I went to work, fourteen.

Y: Work. That was the way of life.

K: And that was it. And I went to work and um, (--)

Y: Where did you start first?

K: Uh, Lawrence Prints Works. (Y: Print Works) Yup. And see, my Dad worked there, and that's how he got me a job. I went into work right in June, after I graduated from Grammar School. 1925? '21. '21. (Y: '21) 1921, and I went to work. And if they didn't have any work in the afternoon they'd send you home. Like I said, there was no unemployment, no nothing, you know, no welfare. You just got along with, with the best you had. And I said the bosses were from England, mostly English. They were, some of them were very good, and they had favoritism. You know, no union. And you sent out in the afternoon. Kids didn't, you know, and the men were sent of the same way. So that, it was different. And you didn't have no coffee breaks. You know, you worked Saturday morning too. 48 hours. I forget. But anyway you worked Saturday morning until noon time. And then they cut that out, and there was a strike, '48, '54. I forget. But things have changed.

Y: Now that was, you are correct. In 1919 there was a strike. '54, '48.

K: Yeah, '48, '54, yeah, right. Right, yeah.

Y: And can you tell me a little bit about what kind of favoritism. What do you remember?

K: Well um, you know, some of the, well I used to chum with one girl. Her father was a straw boss. You know, he wasn't a big cheese, but he was a straw boss. (Y: What kind of a boss?) A straw boss. We used to call him straw bosses. He wasn't the overseer. See, they had the overseer, and they had a boss. And they had these little guys that used to be, (Y: Section hands) like, well yeah, we (--) So uh, (--)

Y: Which one was the straw boss, section hand?

K: Yeah, he was like a section hand, but he, (--)

Y: Why straw? Why?

K: I don't know, straw. We meant he wasn't real, you know?

Y: I was wondering if because of the hats, straw hats?

K: Yeah, some of them wore hats, straw hats. They were, that showed that they had authority. So I found out that at Christmas time her father was getting all kinds of gifts. You used to get wine, cigars, and candy and food, and money.

Y: Money?

K: Yeah, I think there was money. I'm not sure about that.

Y: Yeah, but that's what you heard. You did not see it. That's why (--)

K: And so these kids worked longer than we did. If we were sent home, all right, these other kids stayed. Well I call them kids, because we were fourteen, sixteen, and seventeen. [Voice on intercom in background] So, and they, there was favoritism. But that's, that only happens, in all life there's favoritism. So I didn't think anything of it. But I found out. I said, oh, that's why she's working? Oh, that's why I'm sent home. We didn't give them money, or presents, or something like that. But see, then the union came in and it was great. You know, you had seniority. But the union wrecked the Wood Mill too. I worked in the Wood Mill for awhile. And uh, everybody had to join the union. Now in the mending room where I worked, there was eight hundred woman. And we had to pay fifty cents a week for union dues. Now can you imagine they had four hundred dollars in that one room, and all the other sections. And there was politics, there was gravy train, there was, everything wasn't (--) A lot of, a lot of people that pocketed money. But that's, that's the politics even today. So what are you going to do?

Y: So back to 1921 was the year you started. And you were a young person. And uh, but I guess I those days children matured earlier. They understood (--)

E: I guess so. I went to Evening High. I graduated in 1925 from Evening High. I used to go to school, was it Monday? I forget. I know Monday.

Y: How many days a week? It was nights.

K: It was nights.

Y: After work?

K: No, you used to go home and have your supper. It would be from seven to nine, two hours a weeks. Two hours a night. And uh, it had to be that. I think you went to school five days a week, five nights a week rather. And then in 1925 graduate from High School. And Mr. Callahan was our Superintendent of Evening High. and he dabbled in Politics at that time. He wanted to run for Mayor. And he found out, he says politics is very dirty. He says, don't ever go into politics.

Y: And uh, a little bit more favoritism. I heard some people would grow vegetable and other fruit, and plants.

K: Oh yeah. Oh, the people that have farms, they brought vegetables to their bosses all the time. There was, brought that in, yeah, they did. There were taken care of.

Y: Right. What other things I wonder people did to secure their jobs. I mean they were desperate not to be laid-off I guess. That was one way. I wonder what else did they do.

K: You know, things were bad, but of course, I don't know, you, you made the best of everything. You know, my mother always had a pot of soup on the stove. In back of the stove there was a pot of soup boiling. If someone was coming for dinner, add more water. (Y: chuckles) Had the bread.

Y: Did you have a garden? A garden? A vegetable garden, your parents?

K: Did I what?

Y: A vegetable garden?

K: No we didn't. We lived in a tenement, you know. We lived in a tenement, a three, three flights. (Y: Where was that?) In Lawrence.

Y: Lawrence, what street? What was the address.

K: It was Short Street, but it's moved. It's knocked down now.

Y: Short, Short street?

K: Short Street. That was the name of the street.

Y: How do you spell it? S (--)

K: S O, S H O R T, Short. And it ran right, from the Olive School, it runs down by the river. There's a river there, Spicket river. And it was on the Bank of the Spicket River. And there was nine tenements. They're all corridors in between. And all my aunts were living in that, you know, and all the Lithuanian people. That was a little colony. And I, I got a little from one of my cousins. She said, she used to run in the hallway with another gal. And they used to scream and shout, you know, let out steam. And uh, we always had aunts and uncles. And you know, it was family. Everything family. And uh, I remember the doctor, my mother was sick one time and the doctor came and he stayed with my mother until she got (--) I don't know, he stayed with her for a long time. Then he said to my father, well she's passed the crisis, she'll be all right. Where do you get a doctor like that nowadays?

Y: She passed the cri (--) What?

K: She passed the crisis. She's going to get better, you know. (Y: Oh, I see) He stayed with her. He sat right at the end of the bed and I don't know, he watched her. I remember that.

Y: In your family, besides your father and mother, who else was there?

K: Well I have, I had, I have three brothers.

Y: Three brothers, and your father and mother.

K: Yeah, there were six of us.

Y: That's it? (K: Yup) Because some people had their grandfather and grandmother, uncles and aunts, and uh, (--)

K: Oh, I had aunts and uncles, but my grandfather was left in Europe. my grandmother had died when my mother was twelve years old. And the uh, my grandfather remarried. And on my father's side I don't know too much about his parents. But things are different. You know, I kind of, when I hear what the Hispanics get, they get welfare and they deal with drugs. And what they do, how they live, I'm glad I'm eighty two. I'm not going to be here too long. I'm glad, because I wouldn't live in Lawrence. It's in the pits, it's lousy. Lawrence is lousy. Politics and all. I wouldn't live in Lawrence if I had my way. But I'm stuck here. So. But it is you know, our hallways, we didn't have coverings on the floor. Our floors were white, you know, you could eat off the floors. And my mother would wash the thresholds, and we'd wash the stairs every week. Everything was, we made the place better. And like when these other people come, they wreck the place. You go by Merrimack Courts, you see, see how they (--) No curtains, the windows are broken. And graffiti and all that. We were, we loved this country. Well anyway, that was (--)

Y: And uh, um, did uh, bosses, section hands, overseers, bother the girls?

K: No, you mean harassment? (Y: Harassment) No, I don't think so. I know some girls were going out with some of the bosses. You know, this was when I was older, I knew. And some of the girls were getting beautiful gifts from these bosses for their favors. But that was, I got a little older I didn't believe all of these happening, but they did. That happens everyday nowadays.

Y: I heard that most of the bosses had a girlfriend, although they were married.

K: Yup, yup. Yeah, I know. I know one gal, well she made out very well. Boss used to come to the house, and the mother accepted him. And he was a married man. But, but that's (--) And look at John F. Kennedy. Look what he did. Read about him. Look at Tower, he didn't do anything wrong. This is life. This is life.

Y: So you worked in Print Shop for how long?

K: Well they closed it down. I don't remember. Oh, wait a minute. They closed it down 1941. That was the year my dad died. That's show I remember. I worked then, they were closing it down. They moved down south.

Y: Where was it located?

K: Oh, you know where, you know where the Wood Mill is? Well the next, next plant building, they were going towards North Andover, further down. See, there's the Ayer Mill, there's the Wood, and there was the freight yards of the Wood Mill, and then big buildings. They knocked one of the buildings down where they used to print the cloth. But I worked in the white finish. We only had white cloth. We had different types of cloth. They had percales, and [unclear], and all this. We worked on the cloth. They had just nothing but white cloth. Bleached and all that. And uh (--)

Y: So you did not print anything?

K: Nothing was printed here. But in the upstairs where the girls worked, all this beautiful percale that was printed. And I know that one girl, she had a beautiful blouse on. We admired it. And the boss, when he saw it, he tore his hair up, because that was just a new pattern that came in, was printed, wasn't even on the market and here she is (--) There were a lot of funny things like that.

Y: So that year, 1941, (--)

K: Yeah, oh yeah, so they closed the Wood Mill, and I, I went (--)

Y: No, not Wood Mill. Wood Mill was closed later.

K: Not the Wood Mill. I went to the Wood Mill. They closed the Print Works.

Y: What I meant was it must have been a hard year for you? Your father died and you lost your job.

K: Well it was just (--)

Y: Very depressed?

K: Everybody had that. Well anyway, I was lucky because I didn't stay out of work. There was no unemployment then, you know? And I went down, I went into the Wood Mill, you know, like at one time you could walk into the mills, you know, all that. And I went into the mill. Oh, wait a minute. Someone got me a job in the packing in the Wood Mill. I don't know who spoke for me. They got me a job in the packing. And so then they were eliminating that. There was three girls working there. We used to pack. They had these bobbins of things, we had to pack so many cases. We had, we had a quota to do. So then they said, I was the last one in, they were going to lay me off. And the boss, his daughter was working there. Well anyway, [phone rings] we're going to close. I was going to get laid-off from the shipping department, and uh (--)

Y: We are talking about the Wood Mill now, right?

K: Yeah, this is in the Wood Mill, in the shipping. I got into the packing, and shipping.

Y: But you did not remember who spoke for you?

K: No. I, I don't remember. Someone spoke for me.

Y: That was the way (--)

K: That's how I got the job in the packing. But then I went upstairs in the mending room. But I didn't know the boss, but I found out the boss, who the boss was. I knew who the boss was, but I didn't know what he looked like. So I went up in the mending room before I, you know, the week before I was going, they gave me notice they're going to close. You know, my job was

over. So I went upstairs and I found out it was Mr. Wilson. And I told him who I was. And I said my brothers used to caddie for them. He was a golfer at Andover Country Club. And I told him who I was. My youngest brother was a Caddie for him, and I guess my youngest brother was a good caddie, because they, they used to ask for him, you know. You'd find the balls or something. So I told him who I was. And he said to me then, he said, well how old are you? And I stopped, because I never thought him, you know. Oh, I was about thirty-three years old then. And he said to me, he said jeese, you're too old to be taught how to be a mender, but he said, I let you learn how to be a burler. So that was, you know, like you worked on cloth. And we had a little iron, we picked up the knots, we pushed them out. And then they'd go through a shearing. They'd go through a machine, it was a flame of fire, and they'd burn off these knots in the wool. We had the beautiful wools, yeah 1941. And then (--)

Y: That was called mending?

K: No, that was in the mending room.

Y: Yeah, that was one of the, one of the things they did, right? They burned (--)

K: We got the knots, we raised the knots. And then it was sent downstairs. It was um, it was um, inspected. No, after we got through with the work it went to the fellows. The fellows, perchers, they, they inspected it. And then they send it, then it went back to a, the final perch, another perch, and it was looked over for everything. Then it was sent downstairs where they put it through some machine, and you know, was burnt off these knots. We had some beautiful material. Oh, the beautiful uh, you know it's funny. Every time I see a nice suit on somebody in church I like to feel it, because it's the nice you know, the garbadines and oh, the beautiful, beautiful material. So I worked there. I don't know how many years I worked.

Y: So you became a mender, or percher?

K: A burler. (Y: burler) I was a burler. So they taught me to be a burler.

Y: And your job was to pick up those knots? Pull up (--)

K: Pull up, raised these knots.

Y: That was it?

K: Yeah, and we were on piece work. Then the war came on, we'll say 1941, that was in the war. Yeah, my father died in 1940, because 1941 I was already a burler. And uh, I remember dinner time, it was on a Sunday, Pearl Harbor. And they said, my brother said, oh, that's it. We're in, we're in the war. But anyway, then we started getting all of these keys. You know, the soldiers things. And it was on piecework. And I was making \$100.00 a week. And that was good money at that time. You know I was one of the top ten burlers. When they said there was um, you know, the high burlers, well I was comparatively knew in that field, but I was(--). Well anyway.

Y: I don't understand how one can be a burler on piece work. What is the piece. I mean the whole cloth came in front of you, then what (--)

K: Oh, they came in hundreds of yards. (Y: Yeah) And uh, you had a table, a wide table. And you, [unclear].

Y: What was the piece? What was the unit? What did they count as a unit, a piece?

K: Oh, it was in yards.

Y: In yards?

K: Oh yeah, there was yards written on the end of it. And you had to, when you got through with that, you had to write your number on it. And write it in a book. And then it was, I don't know if they recorded it in the office, or some darn thing. And um, you were paid by the cuts. Some cuts it took you longer to do. You were paid, certain kinds of cuts you got paid for it.

Y: So you were paid by yards then? Is that true?

K: Yeah, we were paid by, well we called them by cuts.

Y: Cuts. Some cuts had one hundred yards, some cuts had thirty yards, or whatever.

K: Well nothing under 50 yards. They were all (--) And you had a partner, you know, the girl next to you was your partner. Well you couldn't lift that alone. You would, on the table you would fold the cloth. You know, she would go from one side, and you'd be on the other side. And you'd fold the cloth. And then you'd roll it up. And you called a carrier, a fellow would come and take that and give it to the perchers. The perchers, we had tags. Certain, you know, certain cuts went to certain colors of tags, or something. They had a system. So then you did that and the union was in. And at that time(--) But uh, so let me understand correctly. So there were burlers, there were menders, there were perchers.

K: And perchers. Yup.

Y: So your job was ?

K: Burler.

Y: Burler. And what did the percher, perchers, or menders uh (--)

K: Well the menders, see, the um, after we got through with it, the perchers would get the cut. And they would mark up if there was damages in the weaving, or damages (--) Then burlers, the menders would mend these. (Y: Fix those holes) Fix those things. And then they were sent to the blue, we called them the blue man, the blue perchers, the final percher after they got done. And it was sent over there. And my number is on, and the perchers number was on. And the blue man, we called them the blue man, he could call you up and you'd have to do it over again if



he thought it wasn't right, you know. When the percher examined your work, he brought it back to you and he would mark up if you missed any knots, he would mark up, you know. But you were not allowed to miss too many knots, because if you missed them they called the boss over. Oh yeah, they called the boss and you'd have to do it over again. So you were losing money. So rather than waste time you would do it good the first time. So you, then it was sent over to the menders. So it was a good job. So anyway, that, that and then they said, well the Wood Mill is going to close. So we'd get week in and week out, or two weeks in and a week out, different on the work, you know, in the wood mill.

Y: Yeah, while uh, so that was after World War II? And I understand people were busy in the mills immediately after World War II, because the boys came home and they needed suit and so forth. Did you notice any change in the cloth from wool to synthetic [unclear]?

K: Yeah, they were using synthetics. See, then that's where the Wood Mill lost out, because all the Wood Mill made was a fine, fine woolen. The garbadines and the beautiful wools. But synthetics came in.

Y: When was that more or less? Do you remember?

K: Well wait a minute. See I worked, I worked there about ten years. So that was forty one-fifty one. That would be about fifty-one these synthetics came in. And the Wood Mill was you know, getting less orders and less orders.

Y: Less orders in wool, or in (--0

K: In Wool. See, they didn't deal with synthetics. It went somewhere else. We didn't, the Wood Mill just wove wool.

Y: So there was never synthetic material in the Wood Mills?

K: No, it was all wool. So then, then they said they were closing down the Wood Mill. We didn't believe it, because when we, they always said they would close down the Wood Mill.

Y: Well where did, who said that?

K: I don't know. The workers. It was a rumor. It was a rumor when I got there, oh, they're going to close the Wood Mill down. This was 1941. I heard it. But they didn't close down till 1951. And uh, so there was no, well anyway, so when we'd get weeks out, a bunch of girls, we'd go looking for a job. We'd go to Amesbury, Sylvania Plant, we'd go, we went to Lowell, The Hathaway Shirt Factory.

Y: So that is after the mill, the Wood Mill closed?

K: It's not closed. We're laid off a week or two, then we'd collect unemployment that week that we were out. For unemployment you had to wait a week. Now if they laid you off, let's say they laid you off for a month. They'll say, come back in a month. Well you'd go and sign up for your

check. First week you wouldn't get anything. But the second week, and the third, and the fourth week, until you went back to work, you know, you'd get a check according to what you made. You know, they're based on your earnings. So um, (--)

Y: If it is more than one month, how long can you (--)

K: Well then, yeah, later on some people collected for a year. You know, when they closed the mill down, they were closed, they were getting for about a year unemployment. But they, but you had to go, when you applied for unemployment you had to tell them where you went looking for work, or they'd send you somewhere, you know, and if you didn't you wouldn't get your check. You'd have to be there, I'd be a hearing on that. And uh, but we used to go looking for a job the weeks that we were laid off. And um (--)

Y: That was the year 19 uh, (K: '50, '52, '53) 51, '52?

K: Yeah, in the fifties. And they had discrimination then of age. See, you couldn't be over forty. They didn't hire you. And uh, (--)

Y: Who are they?

K: Because (-- (Y: Who, who are they?) The bosses. Any place you could go, any factory anyway wouldn't hire you if you were over forty, or if you were forty. That was discrimination. That law came in after, you know, after we were. So we went to Hathaway place in Lowell, and they were only paying .75 cents an hour at that time. And you had to be under thirty, under forty. So then the law came in, and they can't ask. So I have, I had a sister-in-law that worked at Western in the personnel. And she had to, you could, they could ask you when you were born, but they never asked you your age, but they couldn't, they hired you. You know, you got hired. That was later. But there was quite a few years that they didn't hire people if they were getting forty. Haven't you read that? There's a law on, there was a law on that. They passed that law. They had this (--)

Y: Did you have a hard time because you were over forty at that time.

K: I was getting, I was too old.

Y: How did you find a job?

K: How did I (-- Well I finally, then I finally went to school in Boston, Fanny Farmers Cooking School. I said (--)

Y: Well so you couldn't get any employment then, because of forty year (--)

K: No, no I didn't, because I went to school.

Y: Where did you apply? Western Electric? Did you apply there?

K: No. There was no place you could (--) I, I went to school. I lived at home. I went into Boston. I paid my tuition. And my parents kept me at home. You know, they (--) And the little money that I had, I drew it out. I lived on it.

Y: So you gave up finding a job around here, because uh (--)

K: I did, yeah. So I went out to Boston and I went a year.

Y: But your uh, your father was deceased?

K: My father was dead. And my mother and my brothers were home.

Y: Your two brothers lived at (--)

K: Three brothers, yeah.

Y: Three brothers lived at home?

K: Yup. One of them got married and lived downstairs. We bought the house, we bought the house in 1940. (Y: Where was that?) Where I am now. 164 Abbott Street, where I'm living now. We bought that house, a two family house on Abbott Street. And uh, my, my brother was married, one of my brother's was married. And he lived (--)

Side II

Y: ...was the oldest, right?

K: If you listen to any, anybody that worked in the mills, they'll tell you the same story.

Y: No, it's not the same. It is like uh, you look at my feet and see you this finger, and the other one sees that. And from this (K: different angles, yeah, different experiences) different perspectives, and different experiences. So your, what you are telling me is different than other people's stories. So any ways, Charles, who went to New York, was the oldest one. And who got married? The number 3?

K: Bill, yeah, number 3 got married.

Y: So Charles, after Charles (--)

K: He never, he didn't marry till later.

Y: He marries later?

K: Yeah, much later.

Y: He was, he became a Colonel?

K: Yeah, in the [unclear], yeah.

Y: And the second, number 2 was?

K: Me.

Y: You did not marry, is that right?

K: No.

Y: And three?

K: Three married. (Y: Who was?) Bill. (Y: Bill) William.

Y: Bill was living downstairs, or upstairs?

K: Yeah, he and his wife, yeah.

Y: Downstairs, or upstairs?

K: Downstairs.

Y: Downstairs, and the fourth one was?

K: Joe.

Y: Is Joe alive?

K: No. He died in February this year.

Y: What did he do?

K: He worked for New England Power, Mass Electric.

Y: He did not get married, right?

K: Yeah, he married.

Y: He married?

K: Yeah, he married.

Y: So from your siblings you are, you and your brother are alive, right? (K: Yeah) You and ( - ) (K: Bill). Bill. (K: William, yup). Is Bill in Lawrence?

K: North Andover.

Y: North Andover, yeah. Why did we talk about those uh (--) Oh, we were talking about the house. You said that you bought a house where you live now.

K: Well we bought the house in 1939. Yeah, that was it. And when the boys were in the service, they went in the service, Charles went to France, and Joe went to Guada Canal. And he was there five years, and you know, came back. Well anyway, I paid off the mortgage, the house was mortgaged. My mother and I. I paid off the mortgage because I was making good money. And the houses were cheap then. Now that same house could never afford, you could never afford it. You know, what it's, what it's evaluated, although it's, it's going to pot. It's going, it's really, you know, I need, I need so many things done. You can't get help, you can't get this, and getting old. I'm saying, I hope I turn up my toes pretty soon, I'm getting tired.

Y: Well you look good, why do you talk so? I mean you look all right. And nothing seems to (-)

K: I'm enjoying life. I have a good life. I have a good life.

Y: So 19 uh, but I have a question in my mind before I forget. Those three people, perchers, and menders, and um, burlers, (K: burlers, yeah) which one was the prestigious, the most prestigious?

K: Oh, menders! Because that's, that's a trade. That was a trade. If you could mend, oh, that was something. They had to learn.

Y: How long would it take I wonder?

K: Oh, it depended on the person? They had to be fast with the needle. And the way, the different weaves. They had to learn how to you know, so you wouldn't know there was damages. Oh, that's a, that was a trade. But when they learned they didn't pay, they didn't get paid. You know in those days, now when you're learning a job you get paid. In those days you did not get paid. And when I learned how to burl (--)

Y: How long did it take?

K: Oh, the mending?

Y: No, burling.

K: Burling, well it didn't take me long. The first week I didn't get paid. But then I, I made my quota right (--) I think you had to get twenty dollars to be a quota, you now, to make a quota. I made them my quota, and then after that I got speed, and so.

Y: Was it uh, was burling considered a trade?

K: It was what?

Y: Considered a trade?

K: Oh yeah. You know, the perchers, see, they worked like by the windows, in those big windows in the (--) They had a board that many cuts came through. And the, the burlers worked the next to them. Of course they were talking all day long. You know, they'd, they'd talk back and forth. And they said, if a guy married a burler, he married a three tenement house. They used to always say, oh. (Y: burler or mender?) Burler. Or the menders of course, they were in a class by themselves. They were, they were looked up. They were, menders were something. Menders were privileged people.

Y: Because of, because it was a trade, or because they made also more money?

K: Well some of them made more money, but I don't think, some of the burlers kept up with them, you know. It was up to, up to your initiative. Some, some burlers would fool a lot all day long, didn't work. And some menders the same way. You know, they had their eyes on a fellow, or, natural. So I was business. I wanted to make money.

Y: Yeah. Your mother, did she work?

K: Oh, when the Depression, yeah. See, when we worked in the print works we marched in the NRA Parade. And my mother was working in the wood mill. (Y: As?) And uh, she (--) (Y: As what?) She was English drawing room. I guess it was lifting heavy bobbins, or, she said it was a hard job. My mother worked there. And during the Depression, when they had WPA, Bill got a job. They paid them twelve dollars a week, WPA, and certain ones could get a job. And my brother Bill was going to Saint Augustine's Church in uh, he was friendly with Saint Augustine's. That was a Protestant, Protestant Church on the corner from where we lived. And he was friendly with the boys. And he played in their basketball team, and he played in their, when they had their operettas, or things, he was in the, with, with the boys. So the Father, Reverend Bowser, that was who, a priest, another priest, the Minister, he got my brother a job at Fowl Bleachery. There was a Bleachery here at the, Canal Street and Merrimack. Merrimack and Canal Street, there was a small bleachery. Well he got my brother a job there, and he worked so many weeks, and got twelve dollars a week. The would help to pay our rent and our food. And my mother was working, she would get two or three days a week. That helped us o through that, but there was no welfare. We made due what we had. Oh yeah, and then during, during that time when there was a depression, they had these credit cards came in. And I had, I had a girlfriend that worked. She had an office job. She was working. And she got a credit card in Cherry and Webb's. And she would buy a dress and pay a quarter a week. I couldn't do that. My mother would(--) If I didn't have the money I couldn't buy anything. That was my mother. Later on when I was a burler I bought myself a fur coat. But I couldn't buy it on time, because if I didn't have the money my mother wouldn't let me buy it. You know, we had to pay cash. There was no such thing as (--) That was the times. That was different. So um, (--)

Y: In your family was your father or mother the authority who decided about the financial things, or about kids? Was that (--)

K: Well my mother was. My mother was.

Y: She was the boss?

K: Yeah, she was the boss. She was the boss.

Y: So when you took your paycheck, or pay envelope (--)

K: Right. I used to turn all of my money in. Oh, when I was working in the Print Works, I was getting about twelve dollars a week. And I, I was working, I was on piece work there too. And I, I know one time, one year the boss came up and said I had made was it twelve, twelve hundred, well twelve (--) I don't know. You had to make, you filed an income tax. He said, but you, you turn your money in. So you don't have to file an income tax. I had made, and they were recording it in Washington. And I thought, oh boy! Yeah, and I, I, oh yeah, I used to get twelve dollars a week, and when I made fifty-four cents. Give my mother twelve dollars, I keep the fifty-four cents. We'd go to a movie or something like that. Buy myself silk stockings. They had silk stockings in those days. You'd buy silk stockings.

Y: How long, how long did it last that you gave your paycheck? After you became, I mean when you were a little, fourteen years old, I uh (--)

K: Until, I was burler, I was turning my money in. And my mother died in '62 and then I was on my own.

Y: '62. 1962?

K: 19, 1962. Yeah, my mother died in 1962. Up to, up to 1921 till 1962 I turned my money in. Into the household. So then when my youngest brother worked, my oldest brother worked, we turned the money in, and that's how we bought the house.

Y: The boys, the boys did the same thing, (K: they did) or it was especially for girls?

K: No, well more so for me. The uh, the boy that got married, Bill, my mother didn't take any money for him for a year, you know, she kept him. She said that would be you know, whatever, whatever. And his wife said, and when she told, when he told her how much money he had, she was shocked. She thought he stole the bank. You know, it was, I think it was about five hundred dollars that he had, you know, when they, when they got married. So that was a lot of money. And they used to buy furniture. At that time they would buy a refrigerator one, you know, a stove another time. They don't, like these kids nowadays buy the whole house, the car and everything. Yeah, we had a car, 1941, we had a Pontiac. I learned to drive in 1933.

Y: You were the first one? (K: Who learned first?) Bill. He was, he had a girl friend, that he was going to get married. So he bought the, he bought the Pontiac. It was a used one. I forget, it wasn't much money. But then my oldest brother wanted the car. We bought it. And then when the war came along you couldn't get tires, you couldn't get gas. So we sold, I sold it for one

hundred dollars. And the boys said, get rid of it. So we sold it for 100 dollars. That was the Pontiac. And I was scared to drive. Anyway 19 (--) I'd go out. Take the girls, we'd go up to Sailor Tom's. It used to be up in Reading. Take the girls out and go for a lobster sandwich, or something like that. Take a drive up twenty-eight, you know, up by (--)

Y: How did you learn to drive?

K: Oh, my brother Bill taught me how to drive?

Y: That wasn't in school like today?

K: No, no. My brother, oh, he was a bad driver. He was a bad teacher, because you know, in those days you had those shifts, you know? And uh, well I, I was going to ask a fellow that worked with me to teach me, and he said, no, I'll teach you. So he'd take me out. And I only could do three jerks. So he'd take me up by the stadium, there was uh, you know, going by the Holy [unclear], that's a cemetery on this little road. And if I jerked more than three times, you know, like if I don't let it out even, we'd have to go home. Then we wouldn't speak for a couple of days, you know, he'd, I was made at him, and he was mad at me, you know. So then about in a couple of days he said, well want to try again? Oh sure, because I want to learn how to drive. And we'd go out again. and sometimes I'd have a good session. A half an hour or something, you know, start and stall and all that. Sometimes I'd just go out five minutes and come back. My mother would say, what are you back so soon for? Three jerks. He was a hard, he was a hard master. So I learned to drive from him. And then I went, I got my license. You know, I my oldest brother went with me when I got y license. And he sat in the car. It was a hot day, August 15th. A hot day. You didn't have to make an appointment then. You walked in. You know, like now you'd make an appointment to, you walked in, you passed your exam. Your oral and your [unclear]. And then they took you out. And then it cost three dollars to learn. Oh yeah, and if I failed boy, my brother, my oldest brother, he didn't believe women should drive. He had a hard time. I'd know, then I used to be scared to drive. I used to say a prayer when I went out. And I'd thank God when I came back. And then I was, I was a cocky driver. Later on my sister-in-law, you know, we went into Boston and all that. I drove to New York and everywhere. But now I'm not cocky. I'm, I'm getting a little scardy cat. Traffic is too much, and the way the kids drive nowadays they don't, they cut in front of you, and (--)

Y: As I understand, your family, you were a close family.

K: Very close. We had aunts and uncles, and we were very close.

Y: So you bought the house 1940? What did you say?

K: 1939.

Y: '39, and then when did your brother Bill get married?

K: He got married in 1939. He's going to celebrate his 50th this year. In August he's going to be married 50 (Y: still married?), yeah, 50 years.



Y: So he moved to the first floor? And you and your mother, (--)

K: And my brothers on the second floor. (Y: Second floor) Yeah, we lived on the second floor. And we have a Dutch attic up in the back, but we never finished it. It's unfinished, you know.

Y: So Bill and his wife, they were all under the same roof.

K: Yeah, and my mother, after Bill, after his wife went to work, she, of course she worked all the time, my mother was home and she'd cook a meal and we'd all eat together, or it was a good happy family. Very good.

Y: Usually there's an expectation that daughter-in-law and mother-in-law wouldn't get along.

K: Oh, my mother [unclear], she was golden. She was a very wonderful woman. And she was a very good daughter-in-law. And she thought the same thing. There was a very good relationship there. You know, then when I was working in Boston I dated with this girl, and I had my car. 1950 I bought my first car. (Y: New?) Yeah. (Y: No used?) 1950, brand new. It was a Plymouth. It was the car of the year. They called it the car of the year. And we used to go away every weekend. We'd go to the mountains, we'd go to Niagra Falls. And this, this girl and I. And while I, while I was gone she made sure my mother (--) Oh you're taking all of this? What's that for?

Y: Well I can give you a copy of that, do you want? I cannot keep those information. I mean that's uh (--) Don't be scared, that's nothing personal.

K: No, I'll tell you, I'll tell you the truth, buddy, it's silly.

Y: Don't be worried.

K: It's silly. It's silly.

Y: All right. All right. And um, anyway, I guess the car changed your life a little bit?

K: Well I got out, yeah. I got out. Yeah, because I worked at Colby College in Maine. I had a car there. I needed a car when I lived out there. And uh, the company I worked for, um, at first sent me out to Detroit for one summer, and I relieved the dietitian. I was in charge of the dining hall.

Y: Now let's go back. So 19, 1940's you said there was a rumor, gossip that the Wood Mill would close down. Did it make you nervous to hear those uh (--)

K: Rumors? No we didn't, nobody believed it, because they said, they said that a long time ago. No, no one believed it. But see then the synthetics, synthetics came in and that was the thing. You wouldn't buy a woolen suit now? Would you?

Y: I prefer woolen suits. I (--)

K: I prefer woolen in anything.

Y: I specific look, and if it is synthetic I don't buy it.

K: Well there's nothing like wool. It stayed up, and it looks good. Like I buy most of my woolens for the Winter.

Y: It looks good your uh (--)

K: This is not wool.

Y: But it looks good.

K: No, this is not wool. This is synthetic.

Y: But some people argue that that was one of the reasons why the Wood Mill closed down.

K: Well they changed, yeah, they changed it.

Y: Because they did not follow the changes. They did not uh (--)

K: Well you know they had uh, this uh, he was an agent in Ayer Mills. Sumner, his name was Sumner something. And he predicted the American Woolen Company was going out of business because they didn't change. See their machines that they had were the first ones that they ever put in, you know, when they built the Wood Mill. (Y: 1906) That they never changed any of the machines, or anything. So uh, (--)

Y: In fact they did change, but not much. They changed the machines. I mean in 1930's they uh, (K: they did?) they did, but the basics (K: not enough to), the basics were there. Yeah.

K: Yeah. So we had, they had the Stevens Mill in North Andover. That was the Woolen Mill too. But they made blankets too, didn't they?

Y: Blankets. Also the Wood Mill made, Shawsheen Mills, you're right. You're right.

K: Yeah, Shawsheen made blankets, because they used to sell it to the, you know, the workers.

Y: Um, and uh, while you were working as a burler, did people work really eight hours? (K: yeah) They did not have any fun? They did not tell jokes, or sing songs, or uh, tease each other, or have a little conversation?

K: Not that I know of. Well there would be a section.

Y: I'm not talking about you.

K: Well all right. Well uh, at noontime they'd be a few girls that worked around me, we would sit together and have our lunch, you know. All right. Come Christmas we would take maybe a section. There was sections of burlers, or sections of menders. We would take our friends, we would go into Boston. Go to a nightclub, have a lobster feed. We take a train in. And I'll, I'll never forget. The girl next, that went with me, she lived next door. A little bit of a thing. She's dead now. And um, we went to the train. We went, uh, we took a train into Boston. And we came home, and see, we lived in South Lawrence. We crossed the railroad tracks. And there was a car, you know, where they, they had the sleeping people, like workers, they were sleeping cars. The workers on the road. And we crossed over, we went home in the common. So next morning she's telling her husband. And he said, my God! He says, I thought Katherine had more sense. Nothing, you know, we were innocent. Now you know, all these men that were in. Here's two women crossing over. It was at one o'clock in the morning when we got back from Boston. You never, never had an affair, or anything. At home not a door was locked. You try to get into my house, it's like um, what is that, the mill that has the gold, Fort Knox. You couldn't get into my house now because it's locked. I just open it for the paper boy. Well anyway, I talked my head off. Good bye.

Y: Well just a little bit there about your restaurant. So from the Wood Mill, after they closed, you went to school to become a (--)

K: Dietitian.

Y: Dietitian. And then you got your diploma? (K: Yup) That was something like that?

K: Yeah, I got a diploma, I got a diploma.

Y: And then you became what? What was your title?

K: Well I went, I went out, see, the colleges, they have companies that, that put on the food, you know, the services. So I, I worked for Wilbur Company. I don't think it's in business now. He had, he had Boston College. No, not Boston college. He had BU, I don't know, and he had this place in Detroit.

Y: Where did you go then?

K: I worked at BU.

Y: BU. (K: Yeah) As, as what?

K: Boston University at uh, they called it Practical Arts and Letters. They had a dormitory. They called it Practical Arts and Letters. It was on (--) (Y: Practical what?) Huh? (Y: Practical what?) Arts and Letters. (Y: letters) It was a dormitory, a hundred girls and they had two house mothers. And we fed them. They used to come down. It was in the same building.

Y: What was your job?

K: Well I was in charge of the, no, the menu came from the head office, and I was in charge of the people. And we had students working for us. I was in charge of the ordering. I ordered the food and made sure it was prepared properly and sent out. So I worked there about, I don't know how many years. I forget. So then that was before my mother got sick. My mother got sick and I took a leave of absence from the place. Yeah, there were summer jobs too, because colleges had summer schools. I took a leave of absence, and my mother, my mother had pernicious anemia. And the doctor said that if she, you know, if we fed her and all that, so um, so she would, uh, so anyway I, I used to get up in the morning, she'd have a breakfast. We'd have a coffee break at nine o'clock. At noon time we ate. At three o'clock we ate. At five o'clock we ate. My mother didn't put on any weight, but I, I bloomed. I blew out to a hundred and fifty pounds. I was the one that put, because she didn't want to eat, but if I prepared the food for her [unclear].

Y: So you cook, you cleaned up huh?

K: I didn't waste it, so I put it on.

Y: So you were not working there at the time?

K: No, that, that summer I didn't work. And then I went back in the fall, I went to another company. I worked for uh, Marshall's, oh yeah. Marshall's, their headquarters were, was in Lexington. They tell me now Mr. Marshall is working for the government in Washington. He's somewhere with the food field. He was a bologne.

Y: What was your job? What did you do? What was your job?

K: The same job. I was in charge of the people. Oh, when I worked for Marshall's, I worked at Salem State College. And I had hiring and firing, and cashiers.

Y: You took care of the food, how it is prepared?

K: How long you were in that business?

Y: I was in that, see, I was in um, in BU maybe ten years I'll say. No, I can't say how long I was there, but I was almost ten years at Salem State. And then I, well I had a tip with my supervisor. And I thought, well the heck with you, I'm going to quit. So I went to quit. I said, I'll collect unemployment. And he sent a lawyer, and I had a hearing that I quit my job. If you quit your job you can't collect unemployment. So I was so mad I went out and I got another, I got a job. I went, I went to work for Colby College in Maine. And they gave me room and board, and they upped my salary. I, so I worked there for, yeah, I had to close my house here. And wait a minute. My brother, my brother Bill built his house in North Andover. He's got a beautiful house in North Andover. They built their house. Well they've built about twenty years now. And I, yeah, and I'd come home weekends.

Y: So how long on the Colby College? How long did you work there?

K: Maybe two seasons I guess. The first season I was there, we have, you know, they have at Christmas you have a big, a long semester. And the air is so different out there that I didn't realize it was cold. I came back, I was on the verge of pneumonia. It was, the air, you don't realize it's cold, but I wasn't used to it. I came back. And I was wishing my doctor would say don't go back, but he gave me medicine, and I went back. So I went back after Christmas. And then, yeah, I went back and then in June I came home and I collected unemployment there. And they want, they got me a job at Wheeler College, this company.

Y: Same, same kind of job?

K: Boston, yes, in Wheeler College. So I had a run-in with the chef. The chef was dirty, very dirty. He was lazy. I said, well I don't need this. So I quit. I had, one morning, a run-in. And I called my supervisor, and he didn't like the idea I called him. But the other supervisor I worked before, he'd always say, any problems, call me. Anytime I used to call him. But this guy didn't want to be bothered. So I packed up and I came home. And my sister-in-law was working at Western. And she said to me, want a job? I said, sure, I don't know. I'm hepped up. I'm still a workaholic. So she got me a job in Western. And that was the best job I ever had. No responsibilities. I didn't care like if I was (--) See, I had to make my menu a week ahead of time. And um, on Tuesday I would have corn beef sandwich, and I have to order the bulkie rolls.

Y: So you had the same kind of a job at Western Electric?

K: Not Western. No. I sat on my fat can. I was working on with my hands.

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